

MENTAL DEFECT

Penrose, L. S. *The Biology of Mental Defect*. Third edition. London, 1963. Sidgwick and Jackson. Pp. xxiv + 374. Price 42s.

THE FIRST EDITION of this book appeared in 1949* and it was immediately welcomed as something new and valuable in the literature of mental deficiency. It has in fact remained an indispensable source book, bringing together information which it would be difficult to obtain elsewhere, and certainly not in any other single volume.

A second edition was soon called for, in 1953, but as so little time had elapsed this was largely unchanged, with only relatively minor revisions. This new edition will therefore be specially welcomed, for it has been extensively revised, with the assistance of Dr. J. M. Berg and Miss H. Lang-Brown. The approach remains as individual as ever, but there is much new material, including especially detailed sections on chromosome abnormalities in relation to Down's syndrome and also in relation to sex chromosome anomalies, which have considerable relevance to problems of mental deficiency.

It is a book which all interested in mental deficiency, and in human genetics more generally, must have.

J. A. FRASER ROBERTS

PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

Vernon, P. E. *Personality Assessment: A Critical Survey*. London, 1964. Methuen. Pp. ix + 333. Price 42s. Methuen's Manuals of Modern Psychology. Edited by C. A. Mace.

A NEW BOOK by Professor P. E. Vernon dealing with personality and the problems of its assessment will be hailed with enthusiasm and interest. It will certainly deserve applause. In my fellow-student days with Philip Vernon I remember doing personality tests for him in the Cambridge Psychological Laboratory, as a rabbit or guinea-pig, while he observed, recorded, and tantalizingly would not reveal what they were about or what they implied. At that time Professor Sir Frederic (then Mr. F.C.) Bartlett interested us

tremendously by pointing out that in the future psychology would have to undertake the task of developing methods of personality assessment. Professor P. E. Vernon has made a big contribution in this field, mainly by his thorough and objective explorations of it, quartering it like a bloodhound for any hint that psychologists could show us how to assess personality better than ordinary experienced and shrewdly intuitive observers.

This book has an outstanding merit which might be noted by other intending writers with advantage: it starts with an efficient summary of what is going to be said, and the summary forms the first chapter. There is a first-class bibliography, which would be expected of Professor Vernon, who is well known to be able to quote from memory, upon request, most of the references to anything in which another person might be interested. The author index is very full, and the subject index is admirably organized. In the face of this, and in spite of his defensive statements in the Introduction, that no one person could possibly hope to digest and summarize all the evidence, it is a little surprising and perhaps reassuring that the reviewer can think of several personality tests to which no reference can be found. It would not be fair to assume that they are to be regarded as being valueless in consequence.

In spite of his considerable sympathies with "depth" psychology, and his occasional excursions into it, or almost into it, Professor Vernon is in general inclined to align himself with "conscious" psychologists. For instance, he makes the rather surprising assertion on page 10, and again elsewhere, that the effects of child-rearing practices have seldom been confirmed by scientific investigation, and that the effects of early weaning, strict toilet training, mother-child separation, disciplining, etc., on *current* behaviour patterns can be observed, but most of the findings concerning their influence in *later* personality characteristics are negative. This looks rather like an example of ego defence by the mechanism of denial.

It is also disquieting to find, for instance on page 14, the statements that such instruments as the T.A.T. pictures, story completions or play situations, have considerable value in experi-

* See THE EUGENICS REVIEW, 1951, 42, 225.